

WHY SHOULD I DO THE EXERCISES?

Research has shown that pelvic floor exercises done during and after pregnancy decrease the incidence of urinary leakage (incontinence) in the postnatal period.

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL ADVICE

A Continence and Women's Health Physiotherapist can get you started with your pelvic floor exercises and provide pregnancy and postnatal advice.

If you are experiencing some of these common problems, seek professional advice.

- Cannot feel a definite tightening and relaxation of your muscles
- Cannot hold the muscles
- Cannot coordinate your breathing and pelvic floor exercises
- Don't feel confident or are unsure of your technique

All women should exercise their pelvic floor muscles every day.



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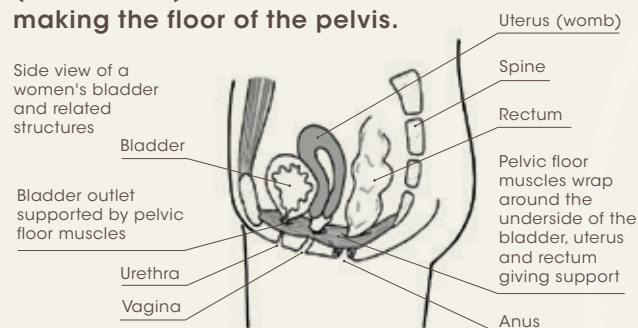
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PREGNANCY AND THE PELVIC FLOOR

WHAT ARE YOUR PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES?

They are a small yet important group of muscles that form a sling from the pubic bone (at the front) to the tailbone (at the back), and sit like a hammock making the floor of the pelvis.



WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

The pelvic floor muscles have a number of important roles:

- Support the bladder, bowel and uterus
- Prevent urgency and the leakage of urine
- Maintain control of your bowel
- Improve sexual function
- Prevent or reduce prolapse
- Provide back support
- Strengthen core muscles and flatten your stomach
- Support the baby during pregnancy
- Assist with the birthing process

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY PELVIC FLOOR DURING PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH?

During pregnancy a hormone called 'relaxin' is released throughout your body, which softens your tissues and allows your body to expand during pregnancy. This also allows your pelvic floor to stretch as you give birth.

Due to the softening tissues and your increasing weight as the baby grows, there is extra pressure on your pelvic floor and the muscles have to work harder to support your pelvic organs.

The pelvic floor muscles relax during the second stage of labour (the pushing stage) to allow the delivery of your baby.

Therefore, it is vital that you can **contract** and **relax** these muscles to provide good support during your pregnancy and allow for the birth of your baby. This is achieved by doing regular pelvic floor exercises.

HOW DO I DO MY PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES?

Exercise 1: Long Hold

Sit, stand or lie (with your knees bent and feet supported) and allow your stomach, thighs and buttocks to relax.

Close your eyes and imagine the muscles you would use to stop the flow of urine, or hold in wind. You should feel a definite lift up inside you, rather than a downward movement.

Now 'draw in and lift' the muscles of your front passage, vagina and back passage and hold for 3-5 seconds.

Continue to breath normally.

Then relax and feel the muscles 'let go'. Rest for 5-10 seconds between each 'lift'.

Repeat this exercise 5-10 times until you feel your pelvic floor muscles fatigue. Always stop when the muscles feel tired.

Perform the exercises 3-4 times per day.

You are aiming for a minimum of 30 per day. After toileting, or at meal times are a good way to remember to do your exercises.

Exercise 2: Quick Lift

'Draw in and lift' the pelvic floor muscles as above and hold for one second only.

Repeat this 10-20 times, and perform four times per day.

Remember to breathe normally, and keep your stomach, thighs and buttocks relaxed. Stop when your muscles feel tired.

Exercise 3: Functional Bracing

'Draw in and lift' your pelvic floor muscles before and during coughing, sneezing, lifting, pushing and carrying.